KARL VALENTIN, MICHAEL KREBBER, PABLO PICASSO

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(A few not very consistent remarks, an opportunity [rather than a reason] for the making of which was given to me by Michael Krebber—or rather, by what there was of him to be seen, heard, or read about. I dedicate them to him, in long-standing sympathy.)

THE ART OF THE ADO

When Karl Valentin remarks "art is beautiful but it is a lot of work," he is reflecting the general conviction that art involves plenty of serious efforts on the part of the artist as well as on the part of the viewer.
This conviction is based on countless experiences—made over and over again by everyone, all the time. Therefore, it should not be in the least surprising if today—where art does no longer even present itself as beautifully as it once did—most people are only able to recognize art as such by the fuss made about it. This cannot be held against the audience, given that for many artists, art critics, and curators nowadays, the distinctive feature of art is that effort they come up with to make not only a social event out of it but also an elaborate theoretical message conform with what is just ruling the so called "discourse."
What was once an insight into the difficult nature of the question as to when something can be considered a work of art has here become a simple recipe for creating art, and is confirmed in the most trivial way:
In the end, the fundamental criteria of art are the ado about it.

TO DO ART AND TO MEAN ART

Not much skill is needed to create something and put it in the world in such a manner that it sufficiently fulfills certain of the historically given or contemporary conditions (object-inherent as well as contextual) of the perception of something as art. This will allow for it to be perceivable as a work of art.
Yet: Is it one?
Well, this much can be said—although it can hardly be considered to be a work of art, it does at least represent art.
As a representation of art—i.e. of what counts for it—such a work is not itself art, but rather meaning art.

Thus it would be, so to speak, not a manifest of fine art but rather a manifest of the art of signifying art. A great number of the works, which are currently exhibited as works of art, are in fact works of such signified art.

"HE WHO SEEKS SHALL FIND!"—BUT AT WHAT COST?!

When Picasso said of himself "I do not seek. I find," he may well have summarized what he took to be the essence of his artistic greatness. At the same time, however, this statement very accurately characterizes a distinctive weakness of his work: There is too much only found in it. Frequently, Picasso's finding—and not only when he came of age—turned out to be rather modest or unelaborated—even though it was, for the most part, very lucky as well. Vain finder that he was, his finding noticeably failed to obey those criteria that come to be applied to finding through the alienating—that is, the unscrupulously explorative, maddeningly inventive, shamelessly bricolage-creating—movement of prolonged seeking. This is a movement that allows for the act of finding to be more than just a lucky incident: A finding in which the given is exceeded and not simply more than it was before.

A large swathe of the admiration given to Picasso's work is linked to the extent to which it permits an affirmation of the widespread and somewhat stupid custom of turning a fortuitous finding into some kind of fetish.

Such fortuitous finding undoubtedly exists, yet several things are deliberately ignored through glorifying it. For example:

Absolutely wanting to find something as an aim in itself can make you blind to what you are looking for—not least to the possibility that the object of your search might be something that cannot actually be found at all but might instead have to be invented or elaborated.

And in the triumph of eventually having found it, what often happens is a celebration of the betrayal of (further) seeking – and incidentally, not only of seeking but also of that which has been sought. For is it not rather the rule that the act of finding that, which has been sought after is far from containing the realization of all the properties and possibilities of the sought after thing which remained present in the search for it. Does finding not mean schematizing—or to put it differently: Reducing knowing to recognizing?

Not to mention the fact that turning finding into some kind of fetish totally fails to recognize that finding is not by any means the sole purpose of seeking. One example might suffice:

The movement of seeking as a medium of representation

By showing somebody in detail how one is seeking something, by demonstrating it to her over and over again and differently each time, the object of the search—in the image she will be gradually forming of it—becomes not only more impressive to her but also

more differentiated than would be the case if you simply showed it to her. (As a simple illustration: The table before my eyes can never be as typically and at the same time, as fully, as "fundamentally," a table as can the table in my imagination.)

In light of the previous remark there is reason to state the following:
If what has been said (with a certain derogatory sympathy) about him were true: That the greatness of his seeking is equal to the minuteness of his finding—then Krebber would have to be seen as an inverse Picasso. This means, he would have to be regarded as someone, who would not ever think he could claim: "I do not seek. I find," but who might rather say of himself: "I do not find. I seek." This would more describe a position of extravagance than something for which we should feel sorry.

WITH REGARD TO PERFECTION

There are works that are "art" in a perfect manner. Everything in them is inspired, mastered, well-balanced, in harmony, sublime—in short: What everyone expects of art is fulfilled in them in the most beautiful manner and thus it is possible to experience through them what "art" is, what it can do.

And then there are works where it didn't happen. Something did not really work out in them and has remained attempt, transition, search, approximation—in short: there is no fulfillment at all. In return, however, these works give rise to the possibility to experience more than "art." More than merely what art is and what it can do: Some idea of where it comes from and what it is after.

In the former case, all that we expect of art might be fulfilled by the work of art, yet in the latter, the work in turn fills us with expectation.—Should this not be considered the more demanding version of fulfillment? Taking the latter as the solely appropriate type of fulfillment for art would in any case not be an entirely novel point of view.

(To give at least a small illustration of what has been said: If you want to understand what Cubism is, for instance—what the so-called art-effort is all about—it is far more effective to look at Picasso's painting *Demoiselles d'Avignon*, where he is still seeking for it, than to look at the paintings in which he has already found it and "can do it." This earlier work is far from being perfect, but in a way, which lifts it far beyond anything that might be mastered in art, in the manner by which it shows something, which a perfect painting does not—that is, something of the conditions of its possibility. Thereby, this work becomes one of the really great, one of the really necessary works of art—works, which are not the all-fulfilling so called "masterpieces." Whilst the latter are to art what a handle is to a door, the former are to art what the hinges are to a door.)